

Cultural Identity and Ethnicity in the Pacific, edited by Jocelyn Linnekin and Lin Poyer. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990. ISBN 0-8248-1208-5, vi + 323 pp, maps, notes, references, index. Cloth, US\$35.

If ethnicity arises only under certain historical circumstances—colonialism and the state-level politics that now permeate the most remote Pacific Islands—will Western ideological influence necessarily transform the very bases by which Islanders formulate their cultural identity? What are the indigenous Oceanic models through which personal and cultural identity are structured and maintained? Are these models antithetical to Western models? Does the increasingly politicized forum of cultural identity necessitate the incorporation of Western models, or can Pacific models offer new ways of integrating cultural diversity? As demonstrated in Fiji and New Caledonia these are not merely academic queries, but emotionally charged core issues applicable beyond the culturally diverse new Pacific nations.

These articles build on recent studies of personhood (Shore, *Sala'ilua*, 1982; White and Kirkpatrick, *Person, Self, and Experience*, 1983), emphasizing that Pacific relational bases of cultural identity result in flexible group formation according to contextual criteria of cultural performance. In their introduction, Linnekin and Poyer propose that "an Oceanic theory of cultural identity . . . privileges environment, behavior and situational flexibility over descent, innate characteristics, and unchanging boundaries" (6). In contrast they

reserve ethnicity to describe the Western-derived categorical nature of group formation that depends on biological criteria and is inherently political in its opposition to "other." Although the contrasts are put forth as a matter of degree, not all authors agree with this distinction. The tension in the articles between the primacy of cultural (Lieber) or political-historical principles (Linnekin and Poyer) engages the reader in an active dialogue with the complex materials presented.

Linnekin and Poyer's introduction sets the stage with its review of theories of ethnicity, recognizing *ethnicity* as both a Western folk theory of group identity and a Western social scientific theoretical construct. The Western theory of ethnicity emphasizes blood ties as the primary, predetermined basis of ethnic identity. Western theory emphasizes the individual as the discrete unit, even as it recognizes the ways in which processes of differentiation may be rooted in colonial and economic societal transformations. In stark epistemological contrast are Oceanic contextual models that establish permeable boundaries of group identity based on ways of action, or, as Watson entitles his article, "Other People Do Other Things." Watson sets forth the contrast between the Mendelian (descent-based Western concept of ethnicity) and Lamarckian (Oceanic emphasis on acquired characteristics through social interaction) models that frame the remaining articles.

Lieber raises the book's critical issue "that Mendelian ontogeny generates an equation between race and ethnicity, while Lamarckian ontogeny, in its Oceanic form, does not" (72-73). He

posits that these differences are rooted in concepts of personhood, further developing Geertz' (1973) description of consociates—the person as “a locus of shared *biographies*” (72), stressing that relationships constitute identity.

Pomponio presents “a Lamarckian case with a Mendelian twist” (43), demonstrating that the two poles of the model are not diametrically opposed, but may, as among the Mondok, merge notions of descent and blood with the absorption of substance and appropriate behavior.

Flinn's article develops the ways in which identity constructed through action rather than essence allows for a nesting of relevant identities that is particularly salient in today's emerging Pacific nations. She provides a detailed description of the ways Pulapese attribute characteristics to their neighboring Islanders, and themselves shift between self-identification as Pulapese, Western Islanders, and Outer Islanders, depending on the context of interaction.

The identity of the Sapwuahfik studied by Poyer is even more problematic in Western terms of descent, for by some criteria the Sapwuahfik could only be considered an immigrant population, since the entire male population of the atoll was massacred in 1837. Yet the people consider themselves a cultural community, both on the island and on the neighboring island of Pohnpei, where Sapwuahfik identity is maintained through active choice rather than passive predetermination.

Linnekin and Poyer have arranged the articles according to their perceived political continuum wherein the societies are increasingly organized

into “Western-style ethnic groups: mutually dichotomizing, politically instrumental populations with relatively stable boundaries, defined by ancestry according to Mendelian premises” (9). This process is seen primarily as a politicized reaction to outsider control. Except for Larcom's study, the articles following Linnekin's essay, “The Politics of Culture in the Pacific,” describe Pacific populations that are today numerical and cultural minorities in their Fourth World homelands—Australian Aborigines, Hawaiians, the Maori. Whereas in the past numerous cultural identities were recognized, overarching ethnic identities of “Maori” or “Aborigine” have now developed in opposition to the dominant whites. Ironically, the very organization of indigenous peoples to combat Westernization is in itself a form of Westernization, the assumption of Western Mendelian concepts of self and substance.

Or is it? As Linnekin provocatively notes, if Hawaiians should choose to follow inclusive definitions of identity used in Polynesia, such as by the Maori, “then Hawaiians are the most rapidly increasing ethnic group in the state” (157–158). It remains to be seen whether Hawaiians will follow the model Metge reports for the Maori: since Maori and Pakeha have extensively intermarried and self-definition is the primary criterion of ethnic identity, the Maori will soon attain numerical majority. The political ramifications of ethnic definitions, and their highly charged emotion content, can cut either way. As such, Pacific representations of cultural and ethnic identity offer a new model by which cultur-

ally diverse communities may structure their interactions.

Larcom's study of courtroom practices among the Mewun of Vanuatu bridges the two halves of the book. The courts predominantly consider cases of emotional outbreaks, which are seen as reflecting the results of social relationships rather than individual action, returning the reader to earlier emphases on consociates.

Tonkinson documents the outcome of racist Mendelian models as Australian governmental policies—Aborigines were segregated on reserves. Despite the apparent contradiction, Aborigines could obtain an honorary white status through abjuring Aboriginal culture and relationships. This followed Australian policy that all Aborigines should assimilate both biologically and culturally to dominant white customs and beliefs. Whereas physical absorption was recognized as impossible, cultural assimilation was not officially abandoned in favor of self-determination until the 1970s.

Although the Maori recognized a number of geographically based cultural groups and have only developed an overarching concept of Maori as a contrast to the white Pakeha, Sinclair documents one arena in which Maori today assert their cultural hegemony—the context of the funeral. The funeral becomes a “time set apart, an event governed almost exclusively by Maori rules and conventions” (231).

In contrast, Dominy demonstrates another manifestation of Maori-Pakeha confrontations of identity and ideology. Both Maori and Pakeha radical feminists recognize the male supremacy cloaked in white colonial

hegemony, joining forces to fight the same societal structures. “Black” thus becomes a highly politicized cultural category including feminist Pakeha, not a racial ascription (244). Yet male-dominant aspects of Maori identity must also be transformed, creating a new assimilationist ideology—one in which the “best” of both Maori and Pakeha cultures will be combined (251).

Although the chapters present internal contradictions and an ongoing dialogue in their attempts to present the contemporary processes by which cultural identity and ethnicity are being used by peoples of the Pacific today, these very dialogues present a significant contribution to studies of ethnicity and cultural change, inviting the reader to engage actively in the process of making cultural and political sense of the issues raised.

Howard's excellent concluding chapter, “Cultural Paradigms, History, and the Search for Identity in Oceania,” makes the reviewer's task difficult as he elegantly sets forth the critical issues, summarizing and connecting the articles, demonstrating the contribution of each to the whole. He provides clear contrasts between the basic assumptions of personhood and identity in Western (in historical perspective) and Oceanic terms, distinguishing between conceptual, relational, and metatheoretical levels of ethnotheoretical propositions (266–271).

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